

From Barile (Urban Park of the Cellars) to Rapolla (Urban Park of the Cellars) via the Preti Fountain and the Cave Church of the Holy Spirit (Mount Vulture)

An itinerary that crosses the heart of Mount Vulture, where volcanic stone tells stories of people, wine and spirituality. The route starts at the Urban Park of the Cellars in Barile and reaches the Urban Park of the Cellars in Rapolla, passing through highly evocative places such as the Preti Fountain and the Cave Church of the Holy Spirit. Covering 12 kilometres, with an elevation gain of approximately 530 metres uphill and 700 metres downhill, the walk can be completed in around four and a half hours, at a relaxed pace of about 3 km/h. This intermediate-level itinerary alternates paved, compacted and unpaved sections, offering a rich variety of landscapes shaped by nature, memory and culture. The walk begins in Barile, a village of arbëreshë origin perched on the slopes of Mount Vulture. The starting point, the Urban Park of the Cellars, is a truly unique place: a genuine “wine village” carved into volcanic tuff, with hundreds of caves used as wine cellars since the fifteenth century. Here, the scent of fermenting must and earth mingles with the echo of tradition. Every spring and autumn, these ancient cavities come alive during wine festivals celebrating the renowned *Aglianico del Vulture DOCG*, a symbol of local identity and passion. Before setting off, it is well worth strolling among the cellars and stone sculptures, including the famous Christ of Barile, a contemporary work that brings together sacred art and popular culture. Nearby lies the evocative Nativity Cave, a natural cavern made famous by Pier Paolo Pasolini, who in 1964 used it as the setting for the Nativity scene in his film *The Gospel According to Matthew*. The tuff walls and the light filtering in from the entrance create an atmosphere of intense spirituality and realism, making this place one of the most authentic symbols of the bond between cinema, faith and landscape.



Figure 1. Urban Park of the Cellars in Barile



Figure 2. Nativity Cave (Barile)

Leaving the village behind, the path winds towards the green heart of Mount Vulture, alternating between cultivated fields, chestnut woods and sudden openings onto wide valley views. Along the ascent, the route reaches the Preti Fountain, an ancient stopping point for wayfarers and pilgrims. The spring, set among the rocks, offers remarkably fresh water that has flowed for centuries and has long been a place of rest and legend. Local tradition tells that priests once came here to purify themselves before religious processions. The surrounding area is a small natural haven, with vegetation typical of the volcanic environment—ferns, broom and downy oak—while birdsong enhances the tranquillity of the setting.



Figure 3. Preti Fountain

The walk continues towards one of the most captivating destinations of the entire itinerary: the Cave Church of the Holy Spirit, carved directly into the tuff of Mount Vulture. Probably dating back to the Early Middle Ages, this sacred site represents one of the oldest examples of rock-cut religious architecture in Basilicata. Inside, visitors can still admire Byzantine frescoes depicting sacred scenes and figures of saints, created with natural pigments applied directly to the stone walls. Immersed in silence and wrapped in an aura of mystery, the church invites contemplation: here, between the rock and the light filtering through the entrance, one can sense the profound bond between faith and nature that has characterised Lucanian spirituality for centuries.

From the rock-cut church, the route begins its descent towards Rapolla, following ancient paths that cross woods and gently rolling hills. The journey ends at the Urban Park of the Cellars in Rapolla, where the atmosphere once again becomes convivial and scented with wine. Here too, as in Barile, the cellars carved into the tuff tell a story of labour, tradition and community. Rapolla is also renowned for its wine production and for its Roman thermal baths, which testify to the area's importance since antiquity. A short detour allows a visit to the Church of Saint Blaise, which preserves a splendid crypt of medieval origin. Probably founded by Italo-Greek monks in the twelfth century, the crypt represents the oldest nucleus of the church. Restoration work carried out in 2013 revealed Norman–Frederician elements and evidence of a bell tower originally conceived as a defensive structure. Rebuilt in the seventeenth century in Baroque style, the church houses thirteenth-century Byzantine frescoes and a striking image of Saint Catherine, added at a later period.



Figure 4. Cave Church of the Holy Spirit



Figure 5. Church of Saint Blaise (Rapolla)

This itinerary brings together the spirituality of rock-cut sacred sites and the vibrant life of wine-producing villages. Among ancient cellars, natural springs and churches carved into the stone, the walk from Barile to Rapolla offers a complete experience: a journey that alternates the contemplative silence of the woods with the convivial atmosphere of village squares, the pleasure of wine with the essence of the sacred. It is an ideal route for those who enjoy cultural trekking, landscape photography and authentic experiences, in one of the most fascinating and characterful areas of Basilicata.



Figure 6. Urban Park of the Cellars in Rapolla